

Mr. Speaker, reauthorization and reform of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is long overdue, and critical to our nation's future. Between 2007 and 2010, the Democratic House Majority repeatedly passed FAA reauthorization legislation – with my strong support – to modernize America's outdated air traffic control system, improve airline safety for the traveling public, and create jobs by improving our nation's infrastructure. After years of negotiation, the Senate passed a bipartisan reauthorization bill in February 2011 that meets these criteria.

Unfortunately, the House Republican majority chose not to bring the bipartisan Senate legislation to a vote today. Instead, House Republicans introduced H.R. 658, a different version of the FAA authorization that slashes \$4 billion from needed aviation infrastructure investments. The \$4 billion cut to aviation infrastructure funding would wreak havoc on our nation's aviation industry, which accounts for nearly 11 million jobs and \$1.2 trillion in annual economic activity. Economist Mark Zandi – Senator McCain's economic advisor during the 2008 Presidential campaign – estimates that the cuts made in H.R. 658 to aviation infrastructure will result in the loss of 70,000 American jobs.

In addition to the threat of massive job losses, H.R. 658 includes provisions that roll-back worker rights and undermine airline safety. One of these provisions would change existing union election laws for aviation and rail workers so that employees who choose not to vote are counted as "no" votes. Needless to say, if these rules were applied to congressional elections, not a single sitting Member of the House or Senate would have won election. Some House Republicans have joined Democrats in rejecting this anti-democratic policy. Republican Congressman Steve LaTourette offered a bipartisan amendment with Democratic Representative Jerry Costello to maintain union election rules within the National Mediation Board that uphold a very basic democratic principle: the majority of those who vote will determine the outcome of an election. I voted for this amendment and was extremely disappointed it failed due to strong opposition from the Republican Caucus.

Another amendment, offered by Representative Bill Shuster, eliminates the common-sense proposal by the FAA to set a single standard for the aviation industry regulating how many hours pilots can fly before they are required to rest. This standard is the result of extensive scientific testing. Rep. Shuster's amendment would abandon the scientific basis for pilot rest requirements and instead create different levels of safety depending on the segment of the aviation industry. Fatigue affects pilots the same, regardless of the plane they fly or the cargo they carry. I opposed the Schuster amendment but unfortunately it passed despite unanimous opposition from Democratic Members of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Congress must pass a long-term authorization of the Federal Aviation Administration that will improve safety for passengers and pilots, make critical infrastructure upgrades, and modernize this essential sector of our nation's economy. I am disappointed that the House will not vote on such a bill today. Once again, Republican leaders in the House have decided that scoring political points and protecting special interests is more important than our nation's future.

President Obama has said he will veto any bill that does not protect railroad and airline workers' right to a fair election or one that erodes the safety and efficiency of our air traffic. Unfortunately, this bill fails on both counts, and I cannot support it.